

# WHO warns of knock-on deaths as Ebola hits health systems

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Ebola-related deaths in west Africa will be higher than the number of people directly infected because of its disruption to already weak healthcare services, the World Health Organization warned Tuesday.

The WHO is convening a meeting in Geneva next week with finance and health ministers from Liberia, Sierra Leone and Guinea, donors and NGOs, to develop "practical actions" on how to improve healthcare systems for the future.

"Ebola has strongly impacted the already weak health systems, and Ebola has probably killed more people than the 6,000 linked to the disease itself," said the WHO's coordinator of health systems, Gerard Schmetz.

He added: "This is a real critical situation that these countries are facing."

Vaccination programmes and general health services have stopped altogether in the worst affected areas of the three countries, which have born the brunt of the outbreak, while pregnancy care has also been hit, he said.

There was already a shortage of health workers—Sierra Leone had only two doctors for every 100,000 people, or just about 120 doctors for six million people before the Ebola outbreak began.

Since then, health workers have been disproportionately hit by the virus,

with 333 dying across the three countries, out of 575 who were infected, the WHO says.

Malaria remains a pressing problem, while people with chronic diseases have had to interrupt their treatment to move to other districts to continue their care, Schmets said.

The gathering on December 10-11 will include representatives of the African Development Bank, the World Bank, the Centers for Disease Control and groups working to combat Ebola on the ground in the affected countries.

"In the longer run we need to strengthen these health systems and to rebuild [health systems](#) that will be stronger, to be able to address future emergencies," Schmets said.

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